

Calif. Assembly refuses to make public its members' salaries

By Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee

The California Assembly says the public has no right to see lawmakers' current office budgets and spending projections, documents that could show whether punishment is doled out for key votes.

Assemblyman Anthony Portantino raised the issue last month, saying that his budget was slashed shortly after casting the lone Democratic vote in the Assembly against this year's controversial budget.

Portantino, the *Bee* and other media outlets submitted Legislative Open Records Act requests seeking, among other things, current office budgets for each Assembly member and any changes to them.

The answer came Monday: No way.

The Assembly Rules Committee, under the control of Assembly Speaker John A. Pérez, said that such documents are exempt under a provision covering "preliminary drafts, notes or legislative memoranda" and correspondence to lawmakers' offices.

"Therefore, records relating to budgets and changes to budgets of the members of the Assembly and Assembly Committees are not subject to mandatory production," said the Assembly's written response.

Read the whole story

Roethlisberger civil case to be heard in Reno

Douglas County District Court will not be the venue for the civil sexual assault case against Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

The accusations against Roethlisberger stem from when he was on the South shore in 2008 for the American Century Celebrity golf tournament. A woman working for Harrah's Lake Tahoe at the time accused Roethlisberger of rape.

Now it will be up to a Washoe County jury to hear the case. That decision was made today by the Nevada Supreme Court.

Also named in the suit are Harrah's employees.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

USPS studying thousands of offices for possible closure

The Postal Service has named 3,655 offices to study for possible closure next year.

It has asked Congress to allow it to cut back to delivery five-days-a-week and to ease the requirement for an annual \$5.5 billion payment to fund future retiree health benefits. Neither has been acted on, which is prompting the current

action.

Currently the post office operates more than 31,000 local offices, branches and stations, down from 38,000 a decade ago.

Of the 1,400 offices announced for review in January, 620 are still in the review process and 300 will move to the new review list.

For communities currently without a postal retail office and for communities affected by these retail optimization efforts, the Postal Service introduced the Village Post Office as a potential replacement option. Village Post Offices would be operated by local businesses, such as pharmacies, grocery stores and other appropriate retailers, and would offer popular postal products and services such as stamps and flat-rate packaging.

“Today, more than 35 percent of the Postal Service’s retail revenue comes from expanded access locations such as grocery stores, drug stores, office supply stores, retail chains, self-service kiosks, ATMs and usps.com, open 24/7,” Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe said in a statement. “The Postal Service of the future will be smaller, leaner and more competitive and it will continue to drive commerce, serve communities and deliver value.”

Here is the current list of offices studied for Nevada and Northern California:

City

ZIP

New study or currently being studied

Baker	89311	New
Deeth	89823	New
Denio	89404	New
Gabbs	89409	New
Golconda	89414	New

Glenbrook	89413	Currently in Study
Lund	89317	New
Manhattan	89022	New
Montello	89830	New
Mountain City	89831	Currently in Study
Nixon	89424	Currently in Study
Paradise Valley	89426	New
Fallon – Pony Express Stn	89406	New
Ruth	89319	New
Schurz	89427	New
Silverpeak	89047	New
Reno – Sun Valley Stn	89433	New
Tuscarora	89834	New
Valmy	89438	Currently in Study
Wadsworth	89442	Currently in Study
Yerington – So. Valley Stn	89447	Currently in Study
Northeastern California Offices		
Calpine/Sattley	96124	Currently in Study
Davis Creek	96108	New
Eagleville	96110	New

Herlong	96113	Currently in Study
Fort Bidwell	96112	New
Homewood	96141	Currently in Study
Lake City	96115	Currently in Study
Likely	96116	New
Madeline	96119	Currently in Study
Milford	96121	New
Ravendale	96123	New
Sierraville	96126	New
Topaz	96133	New

Sierra fire crews on guard despite long, wet spring

By John Holland, Sacramento Bee

Clifford Parker was on patrol when all hell broke loose near Highway 50 in September 1992.

He was working as a recreation technician in the Eldorado National Forest when the Cleveland fire erupted. It would grow to 22,485 acres over 13 days.

"I have never witnessed anything so devastatingly powerful either before or since," Parker, now a Modesto-area resident, recalled in an e-mail this month. He told of how pine trees "popped and exploded as the moisture from within was released

with the thunderous roar of lightning cracking.”

Yet again, the Sierra Nevada had caught fire. At times, a single fire has brought tremendous losses – 280 homes destroyed or damaged in the 2007 Angora fire in South Lake Tahoe, a 145,980-acre expanse of timber and brush burned in the Stanislaus complex fire of 1987.

The Sierra fires have not killed a lot of people, unlike the 25 lost in the Oakland hills blaze of 1991 or the 15 in a San Diego County fire in 2003.

But foresters and fire officials warn that it can happen. They point to the many homes mixed into the woods, the poor roads in some places and state budget cuts that have shrunk Cal Fire engine crews to three from four this year.

Then there’s all that grass and woody fuel, drying more slowly this year because of the cool, wet spring, but drying nonetheless.

“We have uncharacteristic fuel loads, so when fire does enter the ecosystem, there are hotter temperatures, longer flame lengths and greater environmental consequences,” said Bob Mion, communications director for the California Forestry Association.

The Sacramento-based group represents timber industry people who would like to increase logging to help reduce the fuel.

Forest thinning has support from many environmentalists and Sierra residents. They might differ on the total volume or how many big trees to leave, but they agree that the woods need to better resist fires.

Read the whole story

Tahoans asked to help shape policy throughout basin

By Kathryn Reed

What policies would you change to make Lake Tahoe function better?

Define what local contribution means, promote stewardship, overhaul infrastructure, improve transit, who is responsible for operation and maintenance costs, encouraging public-private partnerships, mandatory mediation before litigation, alignment within and between organizations, and balance environmental and economic goals.

Those were some of the overriding themes at the South Shore meetings on Wednesday. While all are not policy statements per se, when they reach Sen. Dianne Feinstein's hands next week they will be written as such.



Renovating the old Mikasa building is an example of the private sector improving South Lake

Tahoe.

Photo/LTN

Steve Teshara, with Sustainable Community Advocates, is tasked with culling together a manageable document to present to lawmakers.

Four workshops are being conducted in the basin at the request of Feinstein, D-Calif. Public sentiment, unlike years past, will be a central theme to this year's environment summit. Feinstein is hosting the public event at Homewood Mountain Resort on Aug. 16 from 9-11:30am.

Two public vetting sessions were Aug. 3 in South Lake Tahoe, with two more today. The first is from 10am-noon at Granlibakken Resort in Tahoe City and then from 3-5pm at the North Tahoe Events Center in Kings Beach.

Five suggested topics were presented to the approximately 30 people (combined for the South Shore meetings), which included:

- Water clarity
- Infrastructure turnover
- Complete streets and transit
- Sustainable prosperity and stewardship
- Opportunities to expand regional match investment for the environmental improvement program.

Forest fuels was not broached until the Wednesday evening session when *Lake Tahoe News* brought up the issue. An unfunded mandate, like Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board's total maximum daily load, was another issue *LTN* triggered discussion about.

While Doug Smith with Lahontan tried to convince the room the

TMDL is not an unfunded mandate, it fell on deaf ears. Same with his contention the regional board does not answer to the state water board.

Consensus was met on the need for greater public-private partnerships as well as looking at the region as a whole and not just project-by-project. Some of the thinking is to better leverage dollars and resources, as well as to possibly have combined projects meet TRPA thresholds.

Several people brought up how agencies don't have the same philosophy throughout the organization. While this is not something the politicians can change, it is something they can advocate for. After all, 85 percent of the land in the Lake Tahoe Basin is owned by public agencies.

It's getting the left hand to know what the right hand is doing.

The same goes for having each agency be on the same page.

"We need consistency," El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago said.

With the basin being such a litigious environment, it was suggested mediation be required before a lawsuit could be filed. While some suggested the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency rewrite the Compact to make that happen, it was noted resolutions are on the books that could bring some changes without the need for an act of Congress.

Ty Polastri with the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition said money is out there, but people are hesitant in the current "I'll sue you if you do that" atmosphere to write a check.

All heads appeared to nod in agreement.

Gary Midkiff, who once worked for TRPA and now has a private consulting firm, said it costs too much money and takes too long to bring a project forward in Lake Tahoe.

While the public has been asked before to weigh-in on such matters with no obvious outcome, this is new to have a U.S. senator go to the residents of Lake Tahoe.

Teshara said he believes Tahoe is at a tipping point – on the edge to right the ship that has been listing for so long.

Anyone wanting to submit policy suggestions may do so until Aug. 8 by emailing them to steveteshara@gmail.com.

Pending cases could lead to more Incline refunds

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

David Creekman really knows how to silence a room.

Washoe County Commissioner David Humke asked the chief deputy district attorney the other night about outstanding lawsuits involving Incline Village.

Creekman said that five cases are outstanding.

In one case, the Nevada Supreme Court has not ruled on the lawsuit that would force county property tax values to be equalized, or made similar, to those of lake properties at Glenbrook in Douglas County. That could mean more refunds for the same 9,000 Incline Village homeowners.

“There is a potential for enormous financial liability in those five cases,” Creekman said. But he later said he had no estimate of what it could be.

Todd Lowe, a leader in the Village League to Save Incline

Assets, said property values at Incline Village and Crystal Bay would be too high even if they were rolled back to 2002-03 levels. He said they were too high then.

The property tax bill for his lakefront home totals \$64,343 this year. The home is listed as having a taxable value of \$5.6 million, most of it in the land.

“I live in the county. I hate to see it unnecessarily harpooned again. But that’s their fault. It’s their actions,” he said.

As evidence, the residents compare the home of Maryanne Ingemanson, village league president, with two properties in Glenbrook that have bigger new homes, more acreage and more beach frontage.

Despite those attributes, Lowe said Ingemanson paid \$369,284 in property taxes during six years ending in 2007, while one Douglas County homeowner paid \$113,276 in taxes and another paid \$151,196 during the same period.

Read the whole story

Failure with Garrido prompts legislative effort to reform parole

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

With the Phillip Garrido fiasco as a backdrop, legislative and law enforcement leaders today agreed to work toward preventing a similar one.

In a public meeting at the state Capitol convened by state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson, officials discussed the failures that led to Jaycee Lee Dugard remaining Garrido's captive for 18 years and offered ideas on how to improve supervision of sex offenders.

Gaines said he plans to introduce legislation soon to address a state Supreme Court decision from 2008 that he and Pierson say has created a spike in the number of inmates serving life sentences who are winning release from parole boards.

That decision held that a parole board may not base a decision on whether to release an inmate solely upon the circumstances of the crime that sent the inmate to prison. Because of that decision, from 2008 through 2010, 1,329 lifers have been granted parole, Pierson said, compared to 1,821 from 1978 through 2007.

Pierson contends that the law needs to be changed to allow parole boards to consider not only psychiatric and other reports on an inmate's behavior but also the nature of the crime.

Gaines said he believes such a change in the law can win widespread support.

Read the whole story

Clean up of soil at Zephyr Cove begins, more samples

taken

With contaminated soil and groundwater found at the site of the fuel leak at Zephyr Cove Resort, more testing has been ordered.

More than 3 cubic yards of contaminated soil constitutes a reportable quantity, explained Cheva Heck with the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Service owns the land on the South Shore where the leak was first reported in June.

Soil samples will be taken until one comes back clean. That gives officials the ability to determine how far the unleaded gasoline seeped to.

No drinking water has been threatened by the leak, nor has Lake Tahoe been affected. However, groundwater has tested positive for petroleum.

As a precautionary measure the tanks holding the fuel were pumped out today.

Aramark, which leases the property from the Forest Service, is looking at changing its fuel operations. Those plans would have to meet local, state and federal requirements.

Remediation plans will begin before the scope of the leak is known. Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and Aramark are working those out.

The leak was discovered during the replacement of fuel pumps to two tanks that are a part of the underground storage tank system.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

CalFire coping with fewer firefighters on engines

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

Just north of Highway 180 in Fresno County, a wildfire in mid-June ate through thick grass, burning into oak woodlands and roaring up steep hills.

For firefighters, it appeared to be a routine event. Six engine teams, including five from CalFire and one from Fresno County, attacked from two sides. Firefighters carrying heavy, 300-foot hose extensions ascended the rocky terrain. They doubled back for additional hose, stretching their water lines and attempted to circle the fire before it leaped a ridge.

But, under state budget cuts, CalFire was battling the blaze with three firefighters per engine instead of the normal four-man crews used in the wildfire season. They couldn't get water around the fire in time. It jumped the ridge and devoured the next canyon.

The incident on what one fire captain called "a standard wildfire" stoked fear over whether staffing cuts are affecting first-strike capabilities of firefighters to stave off severe wildland events.

"I really thought we could catch it," CalFire Capt. Doug Freeman said. "Basically, with the fatigue factor (of using a three-man crew), we just couldn't."

Freeman summoned reinforcements as the blaze that he thought could have been kept to less than 10 acres spread to 133 acres and cost \$300,000 to put out.

As California closed a gaping budget deficit this year with sweeping cuts to numerous agencies, it saved \$34 million by

cutting 750 seasonal CalFire firefighters. That means one less person per engine unit to haul thousands of feet of hose lines and share the exhausting physical rigors of battling wildfires.

In the Sacramento region, the cuts mean a total of 29 fewer CalFire firefighters in El Dorado and Amador counties and 44 fewer firefighters assigned to the Nevada, Yuba and Placer County region.

Read the whole story

Climate change could release toxins trapped in ice

By Susanne Rust, Climate Watch

Despite a global decrease in the production of certain toxic chemicals, we may be in for an onslaught.

That's because rising global temperatures are causing the release of persistent organic pollutants, such as DDT and PCBs, which have been locked in arctic ice for more than half a century.

Although the chemicals were created to provide societal benefits, such as killing mosquitoes and protecting crops, it didn't take long for scientists to see they were having devastating effects on the environment.

Studies have shown many of these chemicals can cause cancer, birth defects and other health problems. And they don't just wash away. Persistent organic pollutants, as the class of chemicals is known, stick around for decades before finally

breaking down.

They also are attracted to fatty tissue in animals and pass through the food chain from one animal to the next.

Recognizing the dangers of these chemicals, dozens of wealthy nations joined forces in 2001 to ban 12 of them by signing the Stockholm Convention on POPs (persistent organic pollutants). Yet since that ban, scientists had noticed localized upticks in atmospheric concentrations of these chemicals, especially over the Arctic.

Read the whole story